

## Health Travel Tips

# Common Health Problems: Skin, Eye Problems and Illnesses

The Planet Traveller has listed down some guidelines to help you evaluate the symptoms and signs of:

### 1 / Skin Problems

#### a. Sun exposure

The amount of ultraviolet radiation reaching the skin increases with altitude and by reflection off the sea and snow, mountain climbing, skiing and water sports. Sunburn can be treated with cool soaks and moisturisers. Sunglasses protect you from cataracts and glare conjunctivitis.

#### b. Drug eruptions or allergic drug reactions

Skin eruptions which can be caused by almost any drugs are among the most frequently observed adverse drug reactions.

#### c. Bites and stings

Insect bites constitute one of the most common skin complaints and may be caused by numerous insects including mosquitoes, bed bugs, fleas and lice. Treatment consists of drying and anaesthetic lotion and can be prevented effectively by the use of insect repellent.

### 2 / Eye Problems

#### a. Conjunctivitis

This infection frequently causes a purulent discharge and the affected eye is red and feels gritty. Antibiotic eye drops e.g. chloramphenicol, should be used according to the doctor's prescription.

#### b. Contact lenses

Bring an up-to-date pair of eyeglasses. At the earliest sign of irritation or discomfort, do not use the contact lenses for at least 24 hours. Keep blinking to renew the tear film under the lens.

#### c. Sunlight

Strong sunlight can damage the surface of the eyes by ultraviolet (UV) rays. Wear sun hat, ski goggles or sunglasses that are UV protected.

### 3 / Headache, Cold, Fever and Sore Throat

#### Fever, chills, rigours, headache and severe muscle aches

If you suffer the above symptoms more than one week after potential mosquito exposures, seek medical help promptly. Malaria has to be excluded by doing blood smears. If you have not been in malarious areas or have not been exposed to freshwater, you may have dengue fever.

#### Cough with yellow sputum, chest pain when coughing/ breathing and fever

Seek medical attention to exclude the possibility of pneumonia.

#### Earache with ear discharge

Often caused by Otitis\* media (inflammation of the middle ear), it is treatable with antibiotics.

#### Fever, muscle aches and dark (tea) coloured urine

These symptoms suggest hepatitis A or E. Both types have incubation periods of 14 to 21 days. Transmission by contaminated food and water. Seek medical attention.

#### Sore throat

If you have no fever and tonsils are not enlarged, treat with lozenges.

#### Abdominal pain and fever

There may be associated vomiting, diarrhoea or constipation. Seek medical attention promptly.

#### Headache

If you are unable to touch your chin to your chest, seek medical help to exclude meningitis. If you have no neck rigidity, no sinus tenderness or earache, take 2 paracetamol tablets.

#### Common cold

If you have running nose, sneezing and generalised body aches, take 2 paracetamol tablets and an antihistamine.

#### Sinusitis\*

Pain can be elicited by tapping the forehead or cheeks. Consult a doctor for antibiotic treatment.

\*Important note: Travellers with a history of recurrent upper respiratory tract infections, such as otitis media, sinusitis and tonsillitis can sometimes be treated presumptively with antibiotics if they are visiting remote area.

For travellers with medical history or when travelling to exotic places, always consult with your family doctor or visit a travel clinic 4 to 6 weeks prior.